



BILL RICHARDSON
GOVERNOR

State of New Mexico
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT
Office of the Secretary
Harold Runnels Building
1190 St. Francis Drive, P.O. Box 26110
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502-6110
Telephone (505) 827-2855
Fax (505) 827-2836



RON CURRY
SECRETARY

DERRITH WATCHMAN-MOORE
DEPUTY SECRETARY

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Contact: Jon Goldstein, NMED Communications Dir.
Phone: (505) 827-0314

Environment Department Plans Public Meetings on New Septic Tank Rules

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) will hold a series of statewide public meetings in May to explain and discuss newly revised regulations that control septic tanks and other household sewage treatment and disposal systems.

The New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board (EIB) recently approved these regulations. They revise wastewater treatment standards that will reduce ground and surface water pollution, provide a mechanism to bring unpermitted systems into NMED oversight, establish monitoring requirements for advanced sewage treatment systems, provide for better maintenance of all types of systems and create certification and training requirements for wastewater professionals.

The new rules were approved April 6, but will not become effective until early June. A copy of the new rules, and a presentation summary, can be downloaded from the NMED Liquid Waste Web page: <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/fod/LiquidWaste/index.html>.

The public meeting schedule is as follows:

Santa Fe, May 2, 6 pm, Genoveva Chavez Community Center, 3221 Rodeo Road
Tucumcari, May 2, 6 pm, Tucumcari Commission Chamber, 215 E. Center St.
Clovis, May 3, 6 pm, NMED Office, 100 E. Manana Blvd.
Rio Rancho, May 3, 7 pm, Rio Rancho City Council Chamber, 3900 Southern Blvd. SE
Espanola, May 3, 6 pm, Mision y Convento, 610 Bond St., Plaza de Espanola
Portales, May 4, 6 pm, Portales City Hall, W. 1st St.
Taos, May 4, 6 pm, Juan I. Gonzales Agricultural Center, Chamisa Road
Raton, May 5, 6 pm, Raton City Council Chamber, 224 Savage
Las Vegas, May 10, 6 pm, Railroad Depot, 500 Railroad
Farmington, May 16, 6 pm, Farmington Civic Center, Arrington and Behrend Streets
Roswell, May 16, 6 pm, NMED Office, 1914 W. Second
Silver City, May 16, 6 pm, Bank of America conference room, 1203 N. Hudson
Carlsbad, May 17, NMSU Carlsbad campus, Room 101, 1500 University Ave.
Deming, May 17, 6 pm Deming City Hall, 309 S. Gold Ave.
Gallup, May 17, 6 pm, Octavian Public Library, 115 West Hill
Grants, May 18, 6 pm, Best Western, Navajo Room, 1501 East Santa Fe Ave.

Hobbs, May 18, 6 pm, location to be announced

Las Cruces, May 18, 6 pm, location to be announced

Socorro, May 19, 6 pm, Socorro City Council Chamber, 111 School of Mines Road

Los Lunas, May 23, 6 pm, Los Lunas Court House, Commission Conference Room, 444 Luna Ave.

Albuquerque, Moriarity, Ruidoso, to be announced

In addition to nearly 1,200 water supply wells, on-site septic systems have contaminated 355 stream miles in New Mexico. NMED has noted areas of septic contamination throughout New Mexico including in Albuquerque's South Valley, the Espanola area, Hobbs and southern Dona Ana County.

Once the new regulations go into effect, all undeveloped lots shall immediately comply with the new regulations if the lot is less than $\frac{3}{4}$ acre and the depth to groundwater is less than 100 feet. If a lot is $\frac{1}{2}$ acre to $\frac{3}{4}$ acre and greater than 100 feet to ground water, with a private well, it will have three years to come into compliance. If the lot is $\frac{1}{2}$ acre to $\frac{3}{4}$ acre, with a depth to ground water greater than 100 feet and on a public water system, it will have five years to be developed utilizing a conventional system.

Under the new regulations developments on lots smaller than $\frac{3}{4}$ acre will be required to install advanced treatment units instead of conventional septic systems. The new regulations also establish maintenance and sampling requirements to assure that the advanced treatment units are working properly.

The rule changes were proposed jointly by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), and by the Professional Onsite Wastewater Reuse Association of New Mexico. The N.M. Homebuilders Association, the N.M. Realtors Association, the Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department, the Cattlegrowers Association, the N.M. Woolgrowers Association, the Dairy Producers of New Mexico and many water conditioning and recreational vehicle campground businesses also participated in re-writing the regulations over the past two years.

The new regulations will implement a certification program for septic system installers. Beginning on July 1, 2007, any person installing a septic system must be certified. There will also be a homeowner certification program for homeowners who wish to install their own systems.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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